

TRIALS OF THE WOMAN BUYER ABROAD

BORED by Her Compulsory Sea Voyage, She Encounters Many Tribulations on Exploring the Smart Shops, and All Her Costly Travelling Must Be Done on a Limited Expense Account.

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OFFERED a position with a fat salary, a large measure of independence, smart costumes from abroad and ocean voyages to soften the grind of work, what woman eager to earn a living would refuse it? The great department stores have such places for shrewd, urbane women whom they employ as buyers; yet the work, with all its pleasurable features, has various drawbacks also. Barbara Deering, who is thoroughly conversant with the subject, here presents a complete and entertaining story of the woman buyer, with whom she takes the reader from a New York store, across the ocean, through the foreign marts of fashion and back again to prove the wisdom of her purchases in the actual test of a season's sales.

BY BARBARA DEERING.

"DO you see that woman?" inquired a passenger aboard a European bound steamer to another as they lounged in their stateroom chairs, commenting on those who passed them in the deck promenade. "She is a buyer for a big shop in New York. Twice a year she goes abroad to purchase millinery for her firm. My stewardess said so."

"What a fortunate woman! All the hats of Paris spread before her and the privilege of buying what she will!"

The woman buyer pays small heed to her fellow passengers or what impression she makes upon them. She is too weary from the performance of a thousand details that pressed upon her until the sailing moment to be interested in anything, and she must rest and lay in a store of strength to meet the demands that lie before her. Moreover, ocean travel is an old story to her and means no more than the subway or elevated trip that she takes daily to and from her business, except for the saving grace that for a few days she is cut off from the anxieties that beset her ashore.

Above everything else she desires to be let alone. If she rouses herself from the lethargy of fatigue she is preoccupied with plans connected with her business. She is uncommunicative because she is little accustomed to talking anything but shop, and she surely will not talk shop with the casual traveller with whom she is thrown. Neither the man who is willing to vary the hours at sea with a little flirtation nor the woman who is curious concerning one of her sex who appears to be prosperous and detached and yet perfectly proper is able to draw out the woman buyer during her six days of interregnum.

Before she could leave reports on the condition of her stock had to be made, future plans outlined and, most important of all, she had to formulate the policy to be followed in her absence.

To the merchandise man she stated her plans. Over her signature she signified the exact amount of money she desired her assistants to spend for "emergency" purchases. This amount was necessarily small, for she has a firm belief that no one excepting herself can select suitable merchandise for her department and she lives in constant fear of purchases accumulating beyond control.

She also furnished the merchandise man with figures representing the amount of sales she expected the department to make while she was away, her calculations being in excess of the sales of the same period of the year before. If the reported sales during her absence do not tally with those she left as a guidance, the assistants will be summoned before the merchandise man, where explanations will be demanded but no excuses accepted.

Tendering Her Figures.

Then came the foreign merchandise man, to whom she submitted her calculations. To him she tendered figures showing her foreign purchases of the previous year, and she placed at his disposal books proving just how much of her purchases she had sold and at what profit. As the results had been satisfactory and as the money spent in the foreign market had proved a good investment, she was informed that she could place orders for a like amount for the next season.

The aim of the foreign man is to increase the volume of business and encourage relations between the American buyer and the foreign manufacturer. He is an enthusiastic individual always ready to unfold some plan whereby it will be possible for the woman buyer to duplicate her purchases of the season before at smaller cost. He is constantly in communication with small manufacturers in the remote corners of Europe and will advise trips to hitherto unknown lands with the nonchalance of one suggesting a ferry trip across the North River.

He will send her to Berlin for flowers and Vienna for wigs, to Dublin and adjoining villages for Irish laces, to Lyons for veiling and chiffons, to Italy for leghorn hats and straw braids. In fact, he regards the woman buyer as a ferret to penetrate into the smallest corners of the world and dig out elusive merchandise. St. Petersburg would be considered simply a little jaunt if a Cossack turban were waiting there to bring fame and fortune to the millinery department and to the foreign office, always on the alert to claim its share of credit.

When all matters pertaining to her journey had been discussed she was given her ticket, her personal expense book and some money.

Her expense book is of greatest importance—to herself. Should she forget to jot down in it a railroad fare or overlook a cab ride it will be charged to her personally.

On the inside cover of the little book which she receives for this purpose is printed the exact amount allowed her for each day, and under no circumstances is she to overstep the limit.

For her room she is allowed two dollars a day. If she reaches a hotel during a gala season and finds it crowded, with prices doubled and rooms at a premium, it means that she must draw upon her own resources, and the difference between the two dollar allowance and the real cost must be charged to herself.

For her meals her firm allows four dollars a day. This seems princely at a glance, but closer investigation will show that the amount is insufficient. A dinner on a Continental express is served at a fixed price and with an accompanying tip. A rushed breakfast calls for additional fees and a willing army of waiters, valets, maids and concierge do not bow her to one's taxi for nothing. Such delicacies as water, butter, ice and table service necessitate further outlay, while afternoon teas, tickets for the theatre and an occasional visit to the Palais de Glace must come under the head-

ing of "meals." These places must be visited to see Dame Fashion.

One dollar and a half a day is allowed for cab fares. Strange ruses and strasses cannot be found without the aid of a cocher or chauffeur. With their aid dollars fly like chaff before the wind.

Laundry, cleaning and pressing are not allowed for



What Manner of Hats Is the Smart Woman of Paris Wearing To-Day and What Will Be Worn To-Morrow?

In the expense book, and clothes will muss and wrinkle in trunks.

Before the advertising chief she was equally humble. "I have selected days for preliminary openings," she said, "and my advertisements are in readiness. My assistants have them and will bring them to you each in due time. The articles I wish to advertise will await your inspection. Will you please place my advertisements effectively and not kill them as you generally do while I am away?"

At last the day for sailing arrived. The fact that the woman buyer sails on a fast boat gives the impression that she travels like a princess, lolling in a sumptuous stateroom, the entire staff of the ship at her command to do her bidding. Not so. She is quartered in a room obtained by her firm at the minimum rate. That is all they will stand for. So, instead of being comfortably settled in a regal suite on the upper promenade deck, she occupies an inside cabin on the main deck, where the only light or ventilation is furnished from the engine room. This is quite a handicap for the woman buyer, who plans to arrive in Paris refreshed and invigorated by the ocean voyage.

Elusive rest! Often it will not come. From her cabin to the deck she goes and back again. Hours drag and the days seem endless. The voyage becomes a torment which she longs to have ended. Finally, the boat reaches port and she is off on the first train for her beloved Paris.

She goes immediately to her hotel, where her ten franc room awaits her. She has wired ahead of it, and as she has occupied it during her sojourns in Paris for many years she knows that it will be reserved.

It is a nice little room, almost a palace compared with her cabin on the boat, but when she gazes from the window her glance rests not upon the Tuileries as one would imagine a woman buyer's window should, but upon a narrow back passage way and a covered court yard.

If it is night when she arrives, she must, perforce, rest; but if it is still daylight, nothing can keep her in. She must go—go—go—up to the Palais de Glace or down to Rumpelmayer's for tea, or she may stop for a moment at the Ritz for a walk through the crowded halls. A visit to any of these places does much to answer the question she is in Paris to solve. What manner of hats is the smart woman of Paris wearing to-day and what will be worn to-morrow.

In her steamer hat and travelling gown she experiences the sensation of being badly groomed and groomed. This will never do! Her personal appearance is as much of an asset as her ability to buy. She must never appear at a disadvantage. In Paris she secures the means; at home she achieves results. Her appearance on the show-room floor after a trip to Paris is of even more interest to the customers than the hats she imports, and quite as many women copy her gowns and coiffure as purchase millinery.

At the Palais de Glace the fatigue of her voyage leaves her as the skaters glide by. Great Heavens! Can such a change be possible? Hats and gowns and even the way of wearing the hair has undergone a complete metamorphosis. Was ever Dame Fashion so fickle or so cruel? Here is the woman buyer in Paris having left it but three short months before.

She reports at the Paris office of her firm early on the morning following her arrival and arranges for some of the small manufacturers to bring in their "sample lines." In the Paris office affairs move slowly. Her request is politely listened to and due note made of it. Finally letters are sent to those whom she desires to meet. These manufacturers in turn send back a flowery worded epistle thanking her and expressing deepest gratitude at her willingness to inspect their samples, but change the day she has set to one more convenient to themselves.

She goes to Armentouville in the mornings. Mme. Letellier, a noted beauty and a wonderful equestrienne, will be there at déjeuner. She will see Madame's new riding hat. She joins the fashionable throng strolling through the Avenue des Acacias, for it is here that the smart Parisienne takes her morning



lingerie buyer of a Boston shop, a neckwear woman from Chicago, a buyer of cheap jewelry from Chicago, and Philadelphia is represented by young women who are authorities on laces and trimmings. They meet, hold conference and spend precious hours that should be reserved for beauty sleep in discussion of merchandise and its problems. They make comparisons regarding the disposing of the same articles in the different cities of the United States and tell amusing anecdotes about "sure sellers" that are still in stock. They argue with and answer each other in matters pertaining to commercial transactions involving thousands of dollars.

After she has been in Paris a week or so she is equipped for her work as a shrewd and discriminating buyer. Down to the Paris office she goes again and finds an American atmosphere in the place. In each of the dingy little rooms sits a buyer from her firm at home looking over the line in which he or she is interested. In one room the upholstery buyer examines cretons, draperies and damasks, hung in lines from the ceiling. In another room the lace buyer is oblivious of all else but the priceless masses put forth for his approval; the neckwear woman fingers jabots and marabouts, the lingerie buyer is hidden behind snowy piles of sheer cambrics from which here and there dainty blue and pink ribbons peep.

The woman buyer removes her new chapeau and immaculate white gloves and sits intent on making a proper selection of "fancy bands." Not much inspiration in them, especially as she is anxious to soar to the more artistic side of millinery, but as "fancy bands" constitute the bread and butter part of the millinery business and are highly lucrative they must receive consideration. A "fancy band," as the name implies, is a galloon used in the making of bonnets and toques for elderly women, although frequently employed in the trimming of hats for those customers who come under the heading of "country trade." It is merely a question of weight, design and quantity, and the woman buyer is relieved when the selection is completed.

"French Mourning Millinery."

Next comes the "cheap mourning" millinery. This class of headgear seldom changes in style. It is made by the gross in the homes of widows or other French women and purchased by the woman buyer in quantities for a trifle. Six to eight francs is the price of one of these hats, which will sell in America under the euphonious name of "French mourning millinery" for \$5 to \$8 each. They are similar in style and material from year to year, at least to the experienced eye, but to the customer who sees them displayed in their cases in America and labelled "Newest Importations" they are very different from anything shown previously.

Other items of importance are feathers and flowers, wings, quills and fancy novelties, such as hatpins and ornaments. These are also "bread and butter" articles, requiring skill in their selection. The vexing question regarding them arises, Will it be wise to plunge on flowers when it may be a wing season? Or, although ostrich feathers may look very good, will they be tabooed later on in favor of some other trimming?

The woman buyer visits the big millinery establish-



The Woman Buyer Visits the Big Millinery Establishments.

After six o'clock a different class of women has free reign at the Palais de Glace and it is as important to know what they are wearing as to study the more exclusive set, for nine times out of ten they are harbingers of those fashions which become popular as well as fashionable, and this popularity extends to America in due time.

The first woman buyer arriving in Paris must bestir herself to be in readiness to answer questions put to her by other buyers as they arrive, each in search of the fashions in her line.

There come the corset buyer from her own store, the

ments with a view to finding a key to this puzzle, but they are as mystified as herself.

Because Georgette shows hats with enormous plumes and Suzanne Talbot hats with no plumes at all does not signify that it would be wise to follow either, when the doubtful situation is made more complex by a tremendous cloche from the establishment of Marie Louise, while the Hebeux collection consists entirely of close fitting turbans—then the woman buyer must aim to duplicate materials which have been used by the leading modistes.

She visits ateliers where families for generations have made one particular style of violet. She has

seen the violet on a Crozet hat, and as she intends buying the model later on she must have the same violet.

A certain moss rose, made only by one old woman in the whole of Paris, must be sought out. Maria Guy is running it. It is made in hundreds of shades, and the woman buyer must be careful to select only those colorings which will appeal to the American taste. Orchids, lilies of the valley and gardenias are obtained in the same manner.

In dealing with the French manufacturer she confronts entirely different methods of doing business from the American. In America the manufacturer is a merchant; in Paris he is an artist. The American will become overstocked and he is in constant fear that he will be caught at the end of a season with a large stock which must be sacrificed. He is ever ready for business and will meet the buyer half way. He will cut prices and encourage special sales.

In Paris, where every article is made by hand and where the demand is greater than the supply, it is the other way. It is the buyer who begs that the order she places be filled and shipped to her.

She may sit patiently all morning in a close and badly ventilated room, looking at samples and making selections, only to find when she is ready to place her order that the goods cannot be delivered at the given time and that her entire morning's work has been wasted; or, what is more likely, he will send her away happy, vowing to fill her order if he must neglect every other client. Yet his merchandise will never arrive, owing to the fact that he has too many orders or that some one following her had offered a higher price.

The woman buyer must take these cancellations into consideration, and to discount such a possible disaster must overlay. When she does this she stands in danger of being summoned to the merchandise office when she gets back to America, for if her instructions have been to spend \$15,000 and invoices arrive for \$10,000 arguments will be unavailing and the only way she can escape trouble is to dispose of every dollar's worth of purchases before the merchandise office has time to call on her for an accounting of her importations.

Buying French models is put off until the last moment, for each day newer millinery is appearing, and the latest is always the best. This is the part of buying that she really loves, for the original creations, fresh from the designers, appeal by reason of their daring. It is amusing to see the unusual and unthought-of uses familiar articles will be put to. Carlier will cover her hats with motifs taken from military uniforms, while Jeanne Lanvin will depend upon tapestries for garnitures. Fruits and vegetables are rendered wonderfully attractive. In fact, there seems to be no article that cannot, at the inclination of a premiere of a big establishment, be converted into a suitable trimming for a hat.

These model hats are very expensive. Four or five hundred francs is not considered at all exorbitant. A venduse will tell you that 500f. is merely a hundred dollars, but the woman buyer realizes, of course, that the duty is added to the cost, and to this must be added interest, foreign expenses, boxing, shipping and insurance, which will bring the hat up to almost \$200 when it reaches her department.

Therefore every French hat brought into her department means a real loss, for it would be impossible to sell it at even the cost price.

But models must be purchased, as no millinery department would be complete without it. From the selection; moreover, these hats must serve as the inspiration for the workrooms, where they are copied and modified until their designer would not recognize their relationship to the original models.

Big names are what the woman buyer is after. They show up well in the advertisements and they draw the customers. The little milliner in a side rue or an out of the way avenue may be a genius and her hats masterpieces, but until she has received the stamp of approval of the fashionable world she does not exist for the woman buyer.

After the woman buyer has decided on her model hats and shipped them she makes a "finishing up" tour, rushing from one end of Paris to the other, from the Quinquer Latin to Montmartre, from Place de la République to the Porte Maillot, through narrow passageways and up endless flights of stairs, gathering bits of lace, pieces of straw, a particular tassel or a ribbon rose. Then she is ready to sail for home.

Her friends have been equally busy and have searched not only in Paris but through the markets of Europe for their novelties, and all work with untiring vigor trying to finish up and get back for openings and exhibitions.

The lingerie buyer has just returned from St. Gallen. The cheap jewelry buyer is back from Berlin, and the millinery buyer herself has taken a flying trip to Vienna and Berlin for cheap flowers and blocked hats. But before departing they assemble in Paris again and each holds her audience spellbound with the story of what she intends to buy for her personal use.

The millinery buyer is especially anxious to know the subject of new hats, for every girl wants to take home at least two.

The lingerie buyer has purchased some lovely combinations, hand embroidered and so close fitting that the tightest skirt can be worn without a line or wrinkle showing. Every one decides that she must have several of this garment. They have probably bought a fresh supply on the last trip, but, eager for the newest and trained to regard the last word upon everything pertaining to dress as desirable, they calculate that the present supply can be passed on to a younger sister.

The cheap jewelry buyer knows of a suspended pearl pendant, an exact copy of one at Bonchereux's, of the Rue de la Paix, and the perfume buyer waxes eloquent over a delicious perfume or a face powder never equaled.

Some one mentions silk stockings and knows where they can be bought at a bargain. Handkerchiefs, of the finest linen, gloves by the dozen, all the little accessories are discussed and arrangements made to purchase them.

This is the time when the woman buyer replenishes her wardrobe, and although she may know full well that she has come over with a firm intention to curtail expenses and is aware that her account from a previous trip has not been fully settled she will plunge with the others.

They pile into a taxi, laughing and untroubled, as though the question of dollars and cents had no place in their lives. When they select and buy for themselves one would think that they were financially backed by the Credit Lyonnais. Should one hesitate, the others urge her on. The corset buyer may realize that she will have no need for a dinner gown or an evening gown, knowing that when it reaches New York she spends her evening in a Bronx flat; still she will have it. If the cheap jewelry buyer orders a gown in blue she has it duplicated in pink.

The millinery buyer indulges in a ruffled white shirt waist and a serge walking suit, although she can wear only chiffon gowns and matched blouses, while the lingerie buyer, whose stock in trade lies in her appearance in the newest and daintiest of wash blouses, rashly selects a gown with a trailing skirt suitable only for a show-room floor and totally impossible within the confines of her department.

They plunge also in the matter of presents, although they have secretly sworn that never again would they be guilty of it. With half yearly trips abroad the cost of bringing back suitable gifts is enormous. Time for going home arrives. The merchandise purchased is already on the water and the woman buyer must follow on a fast steamer, for it will be out of the Custom House by the time she lands, and it must be marked, exploited and got in readiness for the opening.

If fortune favors her she will find one or more women buyers on her steamer, and then each must go her separate way. The millinery buyer may go to London for tailored hats and catch her boat at Southampton. Another goes to Germany and eventually embarks from Hamburg. A third takes a boat leaving Havre, and still another must finish up in Italy and sail home by way of Genoa or Naples.

They wish one another goodspeed. Then come the tedious ocean trip and the worries of the anticipated season, with the knowledge that she has spent more money on her personal purchases than she can afford and must prepare herself when the boat docks to meet her arch-enemy, the customs man.

"The Saleswoman," Next Week.